

Roman Charity.

IN Rome I read a nobleman
The Emperor did offend,
And for the fault he was adjudg'd
Unto a cruel end:
That he should be in prison cast,
With irons, many a one,
And there be famish'd unto death,
And brought to skin and bone.

And more, if any one were known,
By night, or eke by day,
To bring him any kind of food,
His hunger to allay,
The Emperor swore a mighty oath,
Without remorse, quoth he,
They shall sustain the cruellest death,
That can devised be.

This cruel sentence thus pronounced,
The nobleman was cast
Into a dungeon deep and dark,
With irons fetter'd fast;
Where when he had with hunger great
Remained ten days space,
Nor tasted neither meat nor drink,
In a most woeful case;

The tears along his aged face
Most piteously did fall,
And grievously he did begin
Complaining thus to call:
O Lord, quoth he, what shall I do,
So hungry am I?
For want of bread, one bit of bread,
I perish, starve, and die.

How precious is one grain of wheat
Unto a hungry soul,
One crust, or crumb, or little piece,
My hunger to controul;
Hath this dungeon heap'd with gold,
O now would I give it all
To buy and purchase one small loaf,
Yea, were it e'er so small.

O that I had but every day
One bit of bread to eat,
Tho' ne'er so black or mouldy,
My comfort would be great;
Yes, tho' I did take it up,
Tro'd down in dirt and mire,
It would be pleasing to my taste,
And sweet to my desire.

O Lord, most happy is the hind
That labours all the day,
The drudging mule, the peasant poor,
That at command do stay;
They have their ordinary meals,
They take no heed at all
Of those crumbs and crusts that they
Do carelessly let fall.

How happy is the little chick,
Who without fear do go
And pick up those precious crumbs
Which they away do throw;
O that some pretty small mouse,
So much my friend would be,
To bring some old forsaken crust
Into this place to me.

But, O my heart! it is in vain,
No succour can I have;
No meat nor drink, nor water eke,
My loathed life to save;
O bring some bread, for Christ's sake,
Some bread, some bread to me,
I die, I die for want of food,
None but stone wall I see.

Thus night and day he cry'd,
In such outrageous sort,
That all the people far and near,
Were griev'd at his report;
Tho' great and many friends he had,
And daughters in the town,
Yet none durst come to succour him,
Fearing the Emperor's frown.

Yet now behold, one daughter dear
He had, as we do find,
Who liv'd in his displeasure great
For not wedding to his mind;
Altho' she liv'd in mean estate,
She was a virtuous wife,
And for to help her father dear
She ventur'd thus her life:

She quickly to her sisters went,
And of them did entreat,
That by some secret means they would
Convey their father meat;
Our father doth starve, said she,
The Emperor's wrath is such,
He dies, alas! for want of food,
Whereof we have too much:

Pray sisters, therefore use some means
His life for to preserve,
And suffer not our father dear
In prison for to starve;
Alas! said they, what shall we do
His hunger to sustain?
You know tis death for any one
That would his life maintain,

And tho' we wish him well, said they,
We never will agree
To spoil ourselves, we had as lief
That he should die as well as we;
And sister, if you love yourself,
Let this attempt alone,
Tho' you do e'er so secret work,
In time it will be known.

O hath not our father brought us up,
And nourish'd us, quoth she,
And shall we now forsake him quite
In his extremity?
No, I will venture life and limb
To do my father good;
The worst that is, I can but die,
To save him I'll shed my blood.

With that in haste away she flies,
And to the prison goes,
But with her dismal father dear
She might not speak, God knows,
Except the emperor would grant
Her father in that case,
The keeper would admit no one
To enter in that place.

Printed and sold by J. Evans, No. 41, Long-lane, West-Smithfield.

Then she, unto the emperor
And falling on her knees,
With wringing hands and bitter
These words pronounced she—
"My helpless father, sovereign Lord,
Offending of your grace,
Is judg'd unto a piteous death,
Within a dismal place;

Which I confess he has deserv'd,
Yet mighty prince (said she,)
Vouchsafe in gracious sort to grant
One simple boon to me;
It chanced so I match'd myself
Against my father's mind,
Whereby I did procure his wrath,
As Fortune had assign'd,

And seeing now the time is come
He must resign his breath,
Vouchsafe that I may speak to him
Before the hour of death,
And reconcile myself to him,
His favour to obtain,
That when he dies I may not then
Under his curse remain.

The emperor granted her request;
Conditionally, that she,
Each day unto her father went,
Should thoroughly search'd be,
No meat nor drink she with her brought,
To help him there distress'd,
But every day she nourish'd him
With milk from her own breast.

Thus by her milk he was preserv'd
A twelvemonth and a day,
And was so fair and fat to see
Yet none could tell which way;
The emperor musing much thereat,
At length did understand
How he was fed, and not his law
Was broke at any band,

And much admir'd at the same,
And her great virtues shown,
He pardon'd him, and honour'd her
With great preferments known;
Her father ever after that
Lov'd her as his life,
And bless'd the day that she was made
A virtuous loving wife.